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Credo (I believe) : or The Apostles Creed
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CREDO

(I BELIEVE)

OR

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Viewed in a Series of Sermons

By

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"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Rev. 3:11.

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CONTENTS.

		Page.
I.	Special Features of the Apostles' Creed .	9
II.	God, the Father Almighty	23
III.	Maker of Heaven and Earth	37
IV.	Jesus Christ and His Redemptive Work	51
V.	The Resurrection and Ascension, With Accompanying Events	65
VI.	The Holy Ghost and the Church . . .	81
VII.	The Forgiveness of Sins	99
VIII.	The Life Everlasting	115

I

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

TEXTS

Romans 10: 9, 10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Matthew 10: 32-33

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

I

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

It is our purpose to consider the Apostles' Creed in a series of popular discourses. This old and fundamental confession of faith is well worthy of our attention and high appreciation. We certainly so regard it; for we still repeat it in all our public services, our children are baptized in this faith, and you all who have pledged loyalty to Christ in your confirmation have so done by publicly declaring that this confession embraces the real belief of your souls.

There are persons who regard this venerable statement of Christian doctrine as only an old ruin of days gone by, and as not having in it sufficient value for us modern people of the twentieth century to be longer retained by the Church. Some there are who loudly demand a creed corresponding to the progressive thought of the times. Still others wish to construct their own system of religious doctrine. But much the larger number refuse to accept any set form of faith; quoting, in support of their peculiar view, the words of Faust:

> "Who dare name?
> And who proclaim!
> 'Tis feeling all!"

Now we find the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ differing widely from all these notions. He says, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Saint Paul, the Apostle, even makes salvation dependent upon confession with the mouth. To be sure, such oral confession must be most intimately and indissolubly connected with a heart-felt faith. Confession with the mouth should be both an expression and a test of real belief. In this sense then of Jesus, as interpreted by the Apostles, we shall try to present this old symbol of Christian doctrine. It is, as we shall consider it, especially in this our first sermon, *the natural expression of sincere faith, the bond of fellowship among Christians,* and *the victorious banner in our conflict with error.*

1.—The Natural Expression of Sincere Faith

A confession of faith is not the same as the WORD of GOD. If thus regarded, it is invested with a false dignity. Rather let us say that a confession is man's answer to God's Word. A creed is subordinate to that Word; it is tested and proved by it. Neither is a confession when properly understood, a yoke imposed by the Church or Synod upon pastors and people, without their consent. God forbid! A creed should be the natural expression of real belief. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Faith that fills the heart, both humbling and blessing it, cannot but express itself toward God. Viewed in this light, every prayer is a confession of faith in God's omnipotence, omnipresence and love.

Even in one's association with his fellow-men that principle holds good. It is a matter of gratitude for the God-given possession of truth, a matter of sincerity and courage, for one, when meeting with people, not to withhold the most important part of his belief. Besides, it becomes a matter of genuine love for one to impart unto others that which makes him happy. Of course, a confession that lacks the roots of heart-felt belief, one that consists only in certain forms—repeated it may be from sheer habit, or even with hypocritical intent—is worthless. We know of times in the past when the danger of this sort of confession was particularly great. In these days, however, of personal freedom and of the assertion of individuality, such peril is slight. More frequently do we find among people in these days the absence of any kind of religious creed, than that they hold to a confession that is external and insincere. But by refusing to accept of some doctrinal statement you show a lack of conviction; or else, by your antipathy towards all creeds, you give evidence of not being clear as to your belief. Or, let us say that, by concealing your faith, you become guilty of exercising a false reserve.

But supposing that in your case none of these possibilities applies, and that you do not hesitate either in things material to express your opinion or in things spiritual to express your faith, *to what then do you confess?* A great variety of creeds is possible, and there is such a thing as heresy. Therefore your creed may be false. Do you confess, with Paul, that Jesus Christ is Lord? That is the only confession conforming fully with truth. It is, and must always remain, the essence of every genuine creed, be its form never so varied and its parts never so manifold. The

confession that Jesus Christ is Lord is the watchword, the reflex, the echo, of a faith that has felt the glory of the Risen Saviour. The deeper one's experience is, the richer and more complete will be his confession. This applies alike to the individual and his confession and to the Church and her confessions.

The practice of confessing one's faith is found in the Christian Church from the very beginning. The first witness of the kind was Peter's extraordinary exclamation: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The oldest vestige of what may be called a public confession, is found in I Tim. 6:12: "Lay hold of eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast professed a good confession before many witnesses." In the early days of Christianity, applicants for baptism were accustomed to make a confession, before receiving the sacrament. It was a brief statement of their faith in Christ. From this baptismal confession various and more complete statements of doctrine have grown up, both in the Oriental and Occidental Churches. Thus gradually, after a time, was developed in the Occident the confession which we now call the Apostles' Creed. The most fundamental truths respecting Christ were supplemented by germane Biblical doctrines. The claim once made, that this statement of Christian doctrines originated with the Apostles themselves, each Apostle contributing one sentence, rests entirely upon legend. Several centuries intervened between the work and writings of the Apostles and the appearance of this creed in its final form. Very justly, however, we may term it the Apostles' creed; since it is thoroughly Apostolic in its contents. It renders with vigorous simplicity and brevity the preaching of the Apostles. In none

of its statements, not even in those which were last accepted—that is, those telling about Christ's descent into hell, and describing the Church as a communion of Saints—does it deviate from the canon accepted in New Testament times. Since therefore the preaching of the Apostles will for all times remain the indisputable message of God's love and of His plan of salvation,—which message may be interpreted but can never be surpassed, and in which the revelation of God in Christ is always reflected,—so shall this creed, for all times and men that believe in the Apostles' words, remain *the natural expression of their faith,* and as such it can never be surpassed. Let no one however understand us as affirming that this confession excludes other systems of truth, worded differently. Neither does the Lord's Prayer exclude free prayer. Other doctrinal systems have sprung up, especially in the Orient, and these have in certain respects even more accurately developed the Christian dogma. Indeed, every Christian, according to his attainment in faith and the degree of its maturity, will form his own heart's expression, which in some sense may be richer and warmer than the Apostles' Creed.

Nevertheless this venerable old symbol, with its fundamental truths, will always be the frame-work in which our individual beliefs will develop. Indeed, it fully meets the deepest needs of our hearts, and the more we experience of grace and truth the more will it become our hearts' real belief. Its simple letter, in the light of Scripture teaching and of experience, is capable of becoming spirit and life for evermore. "I BELIEVE,"—these are the first words of the Apostles' Creed; and in our farther reflections

let this be our aim, to make this confession something more to ourselves than merely a venerable letter. May it rather become to us a written statement from which we shall learn what the Lord has done for us, what he is doing now, and what he will do; so that this creed shall become in our experience a real matter of the heart, a life-pulsating faith in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And in all this may we as individuals learn to understand, obtain, and possess that divine richness of knowledge which, as is evident from the nature and history of this creed, is the rightful possession of all Christendom.

2.—The Bond of Fellowship Among Christians

This creed of the Apostles, then, is the unsurpassed expression of Christian belief. And for this reason it is also the bond of fellowship among Christians; yes, even of Churches that differ widely as to other doctrines. This confession is most truly a bond; and in it we may rejoice, even in the midst of alienations and separate communions. Naturally the different Churches have set forth their peculiar doctrines in special formularies or in doctrinal books. Our Evangelical Lutheran Church considers her Book of Concord a veritable string of pearls, consisting as it does of Luther's two Catechisms, the larger and the smaller, both being in form splendidly practical; the Augsburg Confession, that marvel and illustration of doctrines such as can be drawn from the Scriptures; the Apology, with its perspicuous clearness; the Smalkald Articles, with all their peculiar force; and the Formula of Concord, with its weighty amplifica-

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tions. Our Church will never lower its estimate of these creedal writings. It will never cease to protest against the errors of the Medieval Church; nor will it abandon its precious testimonies to the truth of God's Word. It will always stand for justification by faith and the universal priesthood of believers. But since these confessional writings are all based upon the Apostles' Creed, and assent to that statement of doctrine; since Luther has enrolled this creed in his Catechism, with an explanation of it such as cannot be found elsewhere in all sacred literature, we, the Lutheran Church of the twentieth century, will not lose our share in the general Christian consciousness for the sake of the consciousness of any one Church. Let us rejoice that in this old Apostolic creed we have a joint interest with all believers in Christ, even with the Church of Rome and the Orthodox Greek Church. Even these communions, although in many things bound in error, could not separate themselves from belief in the Triune God. For in this very confession, both as to the things concerning which it speaks plainly and those concerning which it is silent, lies the path to the overcoming of the errors referred to, and to the unity of faith resulting therefrom. In this confession we are told of the goodness of God, but nothing about the influence of the Saints. Also we are told about Jesus Christ, but nothing about the mediation of Mary. And then, in the end we are told about only one Christian Church, but nothing about the papacy.

Still even on the basis of this Creed we will extend a hand of fellowship to the Roman Catholic Church, so far as its spiritual life is concerned; and our desire is that this Church would accept that

ecumenical confession in all its significance. Also, it is timely to remind the Protestant Church, in all its branches, of the importance of retaining this confession, so that it may serve as *an inseparable bond of communion.* We pride ourselves on our Protestant freedom, on diversity of spirit. But freedom has its limits; diversity needs an inner unity, so as to prevent confusion. These limits and this unity, with its Biblical truth, are found in the Creed we are considering. Reject this confession,— that is, refuse to believe in the Triune God,—and you will reap a harvest; but refrain from calling yourself an evangelical Christian. Let such a person construct a creed to suit his own notions, but an evangelical creed it must not be termed. All persons however who believe in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may rejoice in the bond of this creed as a common possession. Let us emulate one another then in trying to unearth the peculiar treasure hidden in this confession; and let us communicate to one another the results of our labors.

3.—The Victorious Banner in Our Conflict With Error

Moreover let us gather around this victorious banner in our conflict with falsehood, sin, unbelief, and superstition. In our conflict with atheism, the rejection of Christ, and the many destructive agencies now existing, we must have a clear, visible banner, a trumpet that gives no uncertain sound. Such a requirement is met by this Creed. Against atheism this Confession professes firmly, "I believe in God Almighty;" thus at once dispelling all doubt respecting the Divine Being, and animating us with joy and

courage. Against the rejection of Christ, and the making of Him merely a man, it holds forth the testimony that Jesus Christ is "the Only Begotten Son of God, and our Lord." Against a mere glorification and deification of the world, so prevalent in these times, it unfurls a banner emblazoned with the words, "I believe in the Holy Ghost and the communion of Saints." Against self-righteousness it proclaims "the forgiveness of sins," as the Christian's holiest possession. Against materialism, that harbinger of final annihilation, it preaches "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." These are the inscriptions upon our banner, at the sight of which all enemies flee. These are the bugle-calls, at the sound of which the walls of Jericho fall down. These truths bear a loud witness to our consciences, and overcome falsehood. The Church can never afford to renounce them, nor can her members as individuals do without them.

I remember, when a boy, what a sensation was caused by the finding of some tombs below the stone floor of our old city-church, which was about to be remodelled, after having been unused for centuries. It was a structure of the thirteenth century, and had seen the terrors of the Thirty Years' War, also of the Seven Years' War, and the reign of terror of the first Napoleon. On one of the bodies exhumed an old ring was found, bearing the inscription, "Rather die than change," *(Lieber sterben als wechseln).* The allusion was not plain, whether it was some matrimonial troth or a confession of religious faith that was intended. Whatever it might have been, the words are most appropriate as a slogan for the Apostles' Creed, which both the Church and its individual members might well adopt, *"Rather die than change."* Thank God,

the Church has no reason for changing its confession. On this rock Christ has built His Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Should we then desire to exchange our old Creed for some modern fancy? Certainly not! *"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."*

AMEN!

II

GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

TEXT

Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

II

GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Thus reads the first article of our Creed; and to it we shall devote two sermons. There have been times when this section was given preference, not merely in rotation but rather in significance. Some commentators even attempted to limit the entire Creed to this one article; eliminating altogether the second section, on redemption, and the third, on sanctification. On the other hand, there are students even now who would make the second section of this Creed, the one on Jesus Christ, the sole article of their confession. By such scholars the first section is considered to be of comparatively small importance —the A, B, C, if you please, of religious faith. One opinion is as erroneous as the other. To be sure, the first article needs, for its supplement, proper illustration and full interpretation, also the second; for it is only in the Son that we see the Father, and are thus enabled to believe in Him. Still as a factor in bringing about such a supplementing and illustrating of the first article, the second is exceedingly important, and also of great spiritual profit. The first article forms the basis of all cosmography; it gives one a correct idea of the universe. Besides, it instructs us

respecting our needs and deficiencies, as Luther so beautifully expresses this idea in his explanation. Unfortunate is the man who fails to appreciate the teaching of the second article, and ignores Jesus Christ. Pitiable also is the condition of one who cannot testify with all his heart: "I believe in God, the Father." If such faith is lost because of life's hardships or from any difficulties of reason, all is lost. Superstition, a new heathenism, unbelief, and skepticism, all will find a solution of the great inner crises and turning points of life; while the first one enters into our daily life with all its strivings and cares, and there proves itself true.

I.—The Omnipotence of God

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." To get away from one's faith in the eternal, omnipotent God, is the most difficult thing in one's life. No wonder that it is so. God is the source of all power and life. To the unbiased eye He is revealed by the visible universe. The one hundred and twenty-first Psalm and the first chapter of Romans testify of Him. For one to avoid the feeling of omnipotence existing all around him, is absolutely impossible. The heathen with their many gods, are always conscious of the existence of a Supreme Being, or the Highest Spirit. The modern man, in his pride, denies the existence of God; yet he bows down before the mere forces of nature, and makes room for a mere impersonal, controlling Power. Most surely, this submitting to some unknown, impersonal God, that, like a cloud hangs over our entire life, both physical and spiritual, over all our aspirations and pursuits, is the most unworthy, the most unsatisfactory

and uncomfortable position for one to be in. Still it is true that, even in those countries where an Almighty personal God is believed in, and where the idea of omnipotence stands out prominently and becomes arbitrariness, belief in such a Deity, instead of having an elevating influence connected with it, becomes an oppression to the mind. Such is the case with Mohammedanism. In their way, the Mohammedans are a pious people. Their idea of Allah governs them, and you look in vain for atheists among these people. A full recognition of the divine omnipotence, submission without resentment, and patience in all the trials of life, prevail among them. What we miss, however, is that childlike intercourse with God, that quiet cheerfulness, which is so characteristic of the Christian believer. Also they seem to lack a sense of personal accountability and obligation. They have no real life-courage, no individual force; since, apart from the idea of divine omnipotence, there is no room in their creed for human freedom. In the heart of Almighty Allah no love can be found.

II.—The Fatherhood of God.

How different our conception is of that Supreme Being with regard to whom we confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." To us God is not merely the Almighty, ruling arbitrarily over our lives; who, perhaps like an Attila or a Denghish Khan, might abuse his power, using it only for destruction and annihilation. He is our Father. How much wisdom, superiority of mind and heart, and especially how much love there is contained in that word Father! No one could express this idea more beautifully and majestically than the

Lord Jesus, in what He says about the sparrow, (Matt. 6:26-30), or in that other expression of His, "Take no thought for your life," (Matt. 6:25, 26). Here the Saviour—and this is very important—indicates some of the traces of divine love to be found in our own lives. And do we not find such evidence of omnipotence, of divine paternal love, of God's care for his creatures, in nature all around us? These divine qualities are manifest in the arrangement of law and order for the benefit of all God's creatures, and especially of man; also in the preservation and endowments of the different orders of creation, and in the wonderful uniformity of law of the entire universe, from the circulation of the blood to the courses of the planets. Heaven and earth, and all their hosts, are always ready to serve this omnipotent and loving Divinity. In this connection the one hundred and fourth Psalm might be read. It says: "These wait all upon thee that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are satisfied with good."

There was a time when much thought and study were given to what was considered the perfection and the wise arrangement of things connected with our earth. With much fondness for the expression, this planet was called "the best of worlds." About that time the great earthquake at Lisbon occurred, hurling fifty thousand people into eternity. Then, like a hurricane, the question of God's goodness and wisdom swept through millions of superficial minds. It was the perplexing question of how such an occurrence, and the evil of the world in general, could be reconciled with the idea of God's paternal love. Similar calamities have since shaken our earth, such as the

disappearance of the Island of Ischia, the eruption of Mount Pelee on the Island of Martinique; also of Mount Aetna, near Messina; the earthquake at San Francisco, and many other like events. In our own day we have the fearful scourge of the great world-war. And what shall be said of the daily and hourly troubles that occur in the lives of individuals? There are thousands of woes affecting both the lower orders of creation and also humankind; and then there is death, the very climax of all evil. What a contrast is this age of ours, with its many hardships of life, to the days of over-sensitiveness and sentimentality mentioned above! The hideous and the sad things of life are now-a-days canvassed even upon the streets, and with bitter scorn and blasphemous scoffing, men point to *"such a God of love"*—as they say—to *"such a Father of His creatures;"* crying out, "show us, if you can, any trace of divine love connected with these calamities. Such evils without end, do they not rather indicate the existence of some Higher Powers endowed with attributes the very opposite to that of love?"

What answer shall we make? Only this: A mere study of nature and of the course of its events can never give one full joyous confidence in God the Father. Such study can as easily be the cause of doubt as of faith; besides leaving a riddle behind. That riddle can be fully solved, if without prejudice we will only listen to God's Word. God did indeed make all things good. He made man upright; but it was human sin, man's revolt against a Holy God, that caused this great change in the order of things. Sin affected the perfection of God's works, and ruined the happiness of man. Yes, it was sin, most dreadful

sin. God's judgment was provoked by it, and as a consequence the earth is now wrapped in dark clouds of affliction, and death spreads its wings over all creation. Still, notwithstanding the heinousness of sin, God's longsuffering and lovingkindness can be seen in a thousand different way-marks. A beaming light casts its rays into the darkness; it is the royal testimony of God's unceasing love. Or, in other words, it is the revelation of God in His only begotten Son, the redemption of sinful man by the atonement. This which no study of nature, no researches made in human history could give you, will be effected by your looking, in the exercise of faith, toward Bethlehem and Golgotha. Should there be times in your experience when thoughts of God's omnipotence and holiness seem to oppress you, when doubts respecting His love haunt you, when even His very existence is clothed with darkness, go to Bethlehem, go to Golgotha. There you will find what no science can obscure. Jesus is the revelation of God in human flesh, —"he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

The subject of God's grace as manifested in Jesus Christ we will not enter upon to-day. Let that be reserved for our study of the second section of the Creed we are considering. This however we must yet show, in this connection,—how the first article naturally leads to the second, and how the second interprets and glorifies the first. Moreover, such study will show how Christians who in the Son have learned to see the Father, are thus enabled to confess: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty."

Mohammedans, or the confessors of Islam, believe, as we have already seen, in God; but they stop at His omnipotence. Israel believed, and still be-

lieves, in a Holy God, and the fruitage of their so doing is a timid faith. To be sure, they believe, to a certain extent, in Jehovah as their Father,—that is, the Father of His chosen people. The chief manifestation however of God's paternal love,—His sending of the Messiah,— for this they are still looking and hoping. Consequently their belief in God's love does not have that joyous and immovable firmness which is so peculiar to the Christian's faith. We who are Christians, teach the fact of the Father's love manifested in the Son. Before this light, shining as it does over our world, the shadows flee away. Jesus is an inexhaustible source of life, light, and love, flowing into humanity. What an unspeakable blessing is this revelation of God's love! Here is the proof of that love: "If God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). We have in Jesus Christ an overwhelming supply of evidence against all the doubts which may arise from different experiences and observations, and endanger our confidence in the Father's love. He who seeks and sees the way-marks of this divine love only in the works of God, kisses but the garment of the great King. But he who in Christ finds that love, looks into the very depths of the Father's heart, and, with Zinzendorf, is forced to exclaim:

"Hallelujah! Heights of glory!
Depths, unsounded, full of grace,
Telling us the wondrous story:
Jesus loved our sinful race."

A person who, being fully assured of this love of the Father, can thus exclaim, has a keen vision for

all its evidences. Even in the dark and dire experiences of life he recognizes such way-marks. He rises to the conviction that "all things work together for good to them that love God." Day by day his appreciation of the first article of our Creed grows higher and stronger. With such a man this Creed is not merely a Sunday affair, a means of edification in the hours of special graces, a source from which overwhelming impressions of God's goodness may be derived; neither is it something to brood over. But it is with him a blessed foundation of faith, a real source of hope and joy to his soul.

III.—Personal Trust in God

Would that such might be in reality, and evermore remain, the case with each one of us. To believe in God, the Father Almighty, must not be understood as signifying merely a general acceptance of the doctrine of God's omnipotence and fatherly goodness, as of a world governing Power; it signifies rather that one believes he is always dependent upon God's omnipotence, and surrounded by His paternal love. With such an understanding of the idea, one can truthfully say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty." Moreover, this personal belief must not be a part, nor even the principal part, of one's world-view, acquired intellectually or by some process of reasoning, a view superior only to mere pagan and materialistic misbelief and unbelief. But it must be rather the blissful reflex, the echo of real heart-experience, which has found the Father in the Son; and having which experience, one now professes before all the world: God is love, God is my Father.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty." The faith of which we speak is not merely theoretical, or a conviction to which one's mind assents, and which with joyful lips he confesses even against modern unbelief. But it must be most decidedly a practical faith, a constant submitting of one's self humbly to God's omnipotence and a childlike trust in God's love. Also, it must be a source of humility and courage, of joyousness in life and readiness for death; but a source as well of childlike obedience due the Father and willingly rendered to Him, because of His benefits toward us. "A man without religion is lost." So said one standing high in the world. But whether we occupy the heights or the depths of human life, without God we are all lost; lost in disobedience, lost in our needs, lost in death. To be sure, even if we know God as our Father, we may yet not be able to discover what His purposes are with regard to ourselves. His love often enough takes a different course from that expected by us, with our childish ideas and wishes; for His ways are as much higher than ours as heaven is above the earth. But this one thing we know. The Father will not suffer His children to be lost. His love is such that it wills that all men should be saved, and His omnipotence is able to save even to the uttermost. Let this, therefore, be the confession both of our hearts and lives: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty."

"Thy ways are little known
To my weak, erring sight;
Yet shall my soul, believing, own
That all thy ways are right."

AMEN!

III

MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

TEXTS

Acts 17: 29-31

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being: as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. For as much then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

2 Peter 3: 8, 10-14

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in

the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

III

MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The subject of our discourse to-day brings before us some memorable words found in the teachings of two of Jesus' leading Apostles. They belong to Paul's great sermon on the Areopagus at Athens, and to Peter's impressive admonition to the strangers scattered abroad throughout Asia Minor. Both Scriptures have an intimate relation to our discussion of the first article of the Apostles' Creed. In our last sermon we discussed the first part of this section, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty." The remaining part, "Maker of Heaven and Earth," now comes before us for consideration.

"God who made the world and all things therein, He is Lord of heaven and earth,"—thus Paul introduces to the men of Athens "The Unknown God" whom they had been worshiping. This subject which to them, in such light and certainty, was entirely new, we have been familiar with from the days of our childhood.

I.—Creation of the Material Universe

We all know about the story of Creation as it is recorded in the first chapter of Genesis. We remember about the six days' work of the Creator, how our earth that at the beginning was without form and

void, was fashioned as we now have it; the different changes and new creations appearing one after another,—first, the light; then the atmosphere; next the dividing of the water from the land, the bringing forth of grass and herbs; and then the appearing of the two great lights in the firmament of heaven; the creating of fish and fowls; and finally the appearance of man. Some of us do not know more about creation than is given in this Scriptural narrative; moreover, this old story even by itself suffices us. We rejoice in this inspired record, in which God's omnipotence and goodness stand out so prominently; since it is said of God's work, that after every day's achievement God saw that it was "good." What a splendid record, so entirely different from what might be said of our daily achievements, regarding which we are compelled to acknowledge, often with tears in our eyes, that they are not good.

There are persons, however, who are unable to abide in this simple faith touching the Biblical account of creation. They are deeply interested in the discoveries of science and the study of nature, to learn thus, if possible, about the origin of our earth and of the entire universe. To us who believe in the Word of God the so-called results of scientific research and of natural science, are only hypotheses. Considering however the interior structure of our globe, the different strata of rocks, the remains still existing of a previous animal and vegetable world, we do not deny that developments have taken place, and that evolution and revolution have occurred in the bowels of our planet. Even now we notice that great changes occur, caused often by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Whole complexes of things connected with the

earth, are changed, disappear, or take on different forms. Nevertheless if some unbelievers, filled with the thought of these violent commotions, dare to assert in language like this: "There you see, God did not create our world, neither does He preserve and govern it; it is only the forces of nature that do all these things,"—such talk is mere idle prattle. The very operations of nature's forces and the final results they accomplish, prove the existence of a divine will and purpose; and it is only to effect His purpose that God uses the forces of nature. "He walketh upon the wings of the wind;" "His ministers are flaming fire."

And if some scholars undertake to refer you to the long periods of time that must have elapsed in bringing about the present conditions of our earth through so many stages of development, and then scornfully turn to the account of a creation perfected in six days, saying, "How could that be?"—by such language they only show how small is their conception of the word "day." "A thousand years in thy sight is but as yesterday when it is past;" so says Peter, quoting from Moses in the ninetieth Psalm. As to the length of these creative days, some of which evidently began before the sun, which is our time-determiner as to days, set out on his course, we really know nothing at all. Some scientists interpret all these days of creation as long periods of time; and then they try to arrange carefully, within this frame and its successive long periods, all that science has discovered respecting the developments of our earth up to its present stage. Still these matters are only details, things which we may, without any disturbance of mind, leave to the scientists. In such discussions no question of faith, no truths of any determining effect upon one's

conscience and upon his general world-view, are involved. What however in this Biblical record is, and must remain, the most important considerations for us, are truths entirely independent of individual research and scientific discoveries. No science can shake these Biblical truths; and *vice versa,* these truths supplement all that the study of nature can achieve. It is a great truth that the world does not exist of itself; also that it is not eternal, but is rather the work of a wise, almighty and beneficent Deity. And most certainly this is a fundamental truth; contradicting, as it does, all that erroneous deification of nature which in these times is so prevalent, and being, moreover, directly opposed to the delusion against which Peter testifies in the Scripture we have referred to, namely, that this world would endure forever. Being only a created world, our earth with its surroundings is surely doomed to destruction at some day, so as to make room for the new and more glorious works of God, yet to appear.

II.—The Creation of Man

Moreover, this Biblical record of the six days' creation teaches that God did not by one act make use of His omnipotence in establishing the universe, or more particularly, our earth. Rather are we instructed that the world was made by degrees; the higher developments, that is, the more complicated forms of life, succeeding the simpler ones. In this method of procedure one can detect the work of a Great Artist, a pattern to be observed by all activity.

But now comes the third and most sublime part of this history of the creation. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He

him," (Gen. 1:27). In this statement can be seen the great and uplifting truth of man's singular dignity above all other created beings, his likeness to God. In his discourses on the Areopagus, Paul confirms this idea by quoting from Aratus, a Cecilian poet: "For we are also His offspring." In the same verse he had already quoted that poet as teaching this fact in its deepest significance: "For in Him we live and move and have our being." A consciousness of this divine likeness must have inspired the Psalmist in the highest degree, when, combining humility with self-consciousness, he wrote: "What is man that thou art mindful of him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor," (Ps. 8:4, 5).

Over against a wretched materialism, which, through the mere semblance of science, lowers man to the level of an animal; or, worse yet, over against practical materialism, which degrades man actually to an animal with its lust of the flesh and its savageness, thus rendering it utterly impossible to explain the momentous phenomena of human life, what a dignity, what a duty, what a responsibility rests upon us, in our consciousness of being like unto God! When one considers the physical and intellectual differences existing among men from blooming youth to tottering old age, from minds highly endowed to the dullness of a savage, what internal connection, what common dignity, is found in the fact of this divine likeness! But how shall we understand this inspired Scripture? What does it mean by saying that "God made man in His own image?" A physical interpretation of these words, is of course excluded; for "God is a Spirit." Still, because of the close connection

existing between body and soul, an inherent nobility must surely be the property of man's physical system; thus rendering it a fit vessel, a true mirror, a real organ of the soul. This is simply a logical consequence. Unquestionably a reflection of the divine image emanates from the human body. That is apparent in various peculiarities belonging to man, such as his upright form, which indicates royal dignity; his skillful hand, which enables him to force matter into the service of his mind; and his wonderful gift of melodious speech, embodying as that does his inner life. In conformity with its essence, though, the divine image in man does not consist of anything merely physical in its nature, but of that which is spiritual, something superior to the mere visible world. The spirit of man it is that, in its knowing capability, strives after divine omniscience; and that, like a bird, wings its way through both the visible and the invisible universe, making all its own. The spirit it is that, sensitive to all kinds of impressions coming from the world, like an aeolian harp in the wind, gives forth various sounds, at times harmonious, at others shrill, or discordant; that always takes an internal attitude towards the affairs of the world, yes, builds up its own world either of joy or grief. The spirit it is that, in the exercise of will-power, takes the field for conquest and tries to subdue the world, or at least to impress its stamp upon some particular place. Still all these powers of knowing, feeling, and willing, are after all not the best properties conferred upon man at the time of his being created in the image of God. The best of all his gifts consisted in this, that man with his various powers of mind, or soul, was not only rooted in God, but was granted the privilege of full

communion with his Maker. Such a relation imparted power and purity to man's spiritual life, or to his soul. Man's knowing capability sought God and found Him; his sense of feeling was permeated with happiness, because of his being adopted as a child of God; and his will-power submitted, for man's own good, in obedience to the will of his Creator.

III.—Man's Fall From His First Estate

But this crown of man's sacred fellowship with God fell from his brow, in that sad moment of his first disobedience. Because of sin he lost the best part of that divine image in which he was created. To the old question of the Catechism, "Do you still bear the image of God?" we have sorrowfully to reply, "Nay, we lost our first estate by the fall." To be sure, we have not in the full sense of the word lost our likeness to God, for we still retain the soul with its peculiar powers of knowing, feeling and willing. But the sweet fragrance, the celestial luster of this divine image is gone. Our communion with God has been broken, and as a consequence the purity of our soul-powers is lost, and their capability for achievement has been lessened. A dark cloud has spread over the human understanding. Evidence of that can be seen in the pagan world. The very best thing our human race has, its knowledge of God, is there perverted to heathenism.

In the realm of our feelings care and anxiety, discord and hatred, have usurped the throne, while joy and love have departed. The human will is no longer guided by the divine will; it follows perverse aims, and wherever the "will to do good" is present with man the "how to perform" cannot be found.

(Rom. 7:18). To compare the soul in its first estate with what it has become by the fall, it now appears like a ruined temple. What was once a great structure towering up towards heaven, with majestic portals and high-reaching columns, now lies prostrate and scattered in debris. Or to take another illustration, the soul may be likened to a tract of land which before the fall was a blooming garden, a delight to the eye, but now has become a barren waste. Or it may be compared to a fire, once blazing up with strength, but which now, having completely died down, is only a heap of ashes.

But yet, thanks be to God, we need not despair. The foundation wall of that old temple is still intact, and a skillful architect might gather up the fragments of that debris, put them together, and thus erect a new and beautiful building. So also in that neglected garden there is a hidden spring bubbling up, and an expert gardener might conduct the water of that spring over all this tract of land, thus irrigating and re-fertilizing it. And as to the heap of ashes, there is still a spark of fire slumbering in it, which a breath of air might kindle into a strong flame.

That foundation, that spring and that spark,—these comparisons represent what is left in man of his original communion with God; that is, his inclination, or feeling, toward God, or what may be termed *CONSCIENCE*. Conscience is that infinitely precious heritage, still left in man, which has saved the human race, through all the devastation of sin and heathenism, even from creation and the fall until now. That inner voice, although unable from its own resources to renew and sanctify itself, has prevented man from becoming completely indifferent and dead

to all divine and spiritual impressions. Conscience forms the indispensable link between the human soul and divine grace. It is the open gate through which a new creative power from above can enter the human spirit. A most wonderful thing is this conscience of ours! It is a part, yes, the very best part, of our personality, and yet it acts in direct contradiction to our fallen impulses and appetites. It is so absolute and imperious, so sharp in its demands, and yet so weak in achieving results. The great philosopher, Kant, once declared that there are only two miracles; one being the starry heavens above us, and the other a good conscience within us.

Let this therefore be the practical lesson to be learned from our discourse to-day. Whatever miracles there may be outside of us in the natural world, let us not forget the great miracle within us. You should esteem and cultivate conscience; it is as tender and sensitive as it is precious. In all your progress made in knowledge, be sure to follow the direction of conscience. It points you beyond all earthly powers to God, as Paul declares in his speech at Athens, (Acts 17:25-27), saying that "men should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him." Amid all your varied feelings, pay strict attention to conscience; and whenever an agonizing affection, or an inner sense of reproach, comes over you, perhaps in spite of great outward success and the approbation of men, you should understand that this is an evil conscience, or the protest of conscience. Purge your consciences, then, purge them, if such is their condition. And on the other hand, when happiness fills your souls, in times of cross-bearing and even of self-denial, blessed are you, for you have a good

conscience. Persist then, persist in so doing. Give heed to the voice of conscience when weighty decisions have to be made; follow conscience when it advises you contrary to your inclinations or to public opinion; follow it when it points you to the commands of God, or when it stations you on the battle-field, there to meet your deadly foe, that is, the flesh. Follow conscience then, I say; and the more willingly you do so the more plainly will it speak to you. Only thus, moreover, will you comprehend, will you be able to reach, the goal of eternal happiness. Besides, by following conscience you will appreciate the fact that it is indeed a stern, legalistic judge, but also a faithful friend; not however your Creator to renew you, nor your Saviour to redeem you. Follow conscience when it calls you to repentance and to sorrow for sin; also when it moves you to ask for Him who is the Conqueror of sin, that is, Jesus Christ.

And it might yet be remarked here, that conscience will throw, for us, a bridge from the first article of our Creed, which confesses faith in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, over to the second article, or Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord; to whom it was that the Apostle Paul so urgently called the people of Athens, and to whom also he now in like manner calls you.

AMEN!

IV

JESUS CHRIST, AND HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK

TEXTS

Matthew 11: 25-30

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seems good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Acts 4: 8-12

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Revelation 7: 9, 10

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

IV

JESUS CHRIST, AND HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK

This second article of the Creed we are studying tells about Jesus Christ and His work of redemption. We will now give attention to the first part of this section: "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried." In discussing this section we are in position to be relatively briefer, and to proceed more rapidly, than with our previous sermons; since the truths of this second article, on redemption, are more frequently dwelt upon in sermons than are those contained in the first and third articles. In fact, these truths of the second article necessarily form the main substance of all evangelical preaching.

In our comments on the first article, we mentioned the fact that, in the past, some scholars have been inclined to give this section a secondary place in the way of importance. The same may be said respecting the second article. The chief emphasis was put upon the knowledge and worship of God, the Father; upon creation and preservation, and the miracles connected with those divine works. But as great and glorious as those things might be, we were compelled to confess in our last discourse that man,

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the noblest of all God's works, the very image of his Maker, has been turned aside from the purpose of his creation, and has lost his blessed estate. Moreover, we know that death, which is the wages of sin, has cast its somber shadows over the human race and over all creation. In the one hundred and fourth Psalm a touching strain of sacred music can be heard. The poet, after traveling, so to speak, all through creation, and after minutely describing the things he has seen, exclaims, with praise on his lips: "Let the sinner be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord." It was as much as to say that an ugly stain spoiled the looks of creation. It was human sin; and it was only after the removal of that sin that the heart of the poet could rejoice in God and in the works of His hands. But all human capability and art, all the efforts of mind and conscience, cannot avail to wipe out that dark spot, or to transform vile sinners into children of God, pure and blessed. That can only be done, and has been done, by such an overpowering manifestation of God's love as appears in redemption. Such love was manifested in Jesus Christ. "I believe"—so runs this Creed of the Apostles—"in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord."

I.—Meaning of the Words, Jesus and Christ

These two words—Jesus, Christ—are not mere accidental names, such as ours usually are, but they rather denote character or essence. The word Jesus signifies Saviour, Redeemer, and what is implied in this name in the way of deliverance. That is, it means

that Jesus saves from sin and death, or that sin and death have been conquered by Him. The word Christ, however, has more of a positive or supplementary meaning connected with it. It tells all about the salvation which Christ accomplished. The word signifies "Anointed," and it reminds one of the anointed characters of olden times—the prophets, the high priests, and the kings. It represents and exalts Jesus as a Prophet, anointed with the Holy Ghost, who declares the whole truth of God; also as a High Priest, who offers an availing sacrifice; and as a King, who sways an eternal and world-ruling scepter.

To believe in Jesus Christ, then, is to confess the full salvation revealed in Christ. And with its personal reference,—"I believe,"—this old Creed of the Apostles as much as declares: "I, even I, a poor sinful man, have found in Jesus my Redeemer. Praise God forever! Jesus shall then redeem me from all my burden of sin, from guilt, and from death. I, a poor, heavy laden mortal, do acknowledge in Christ a Prophet whose message I am ready to hear, a High Priest by whom I desire to be reconciled to God, and a King under whose reign I wish to live in safety and peace evermore." A person who does not recognize, in the man of Nazareth and Golgotha, the Redeemer of the world, the Anointed One of God, may yet in many ways show admiration for Him, he may even strive to follow Him; but to believe in Him he will not be able, any more than a man can, because of his relation to excellent people, believe in them.

II.—Christ's Divinity and Humanity

But if I, or you, really believe in Jesus as the Redeemer, the Anointed One of God, in whom there

is salvation, such a belief involves a confession of Christ's superior, divine nature. For a man who is only a man, is himself in need of redemption; he can never redeem his brother. This can be accomplished only by Him who, in our Creed, is called also "The Only Begotten Son of God."

"The Only Begotten Son of God,"—this peculiar title distinguishes Christ from those who are sons of God only by adoption. Such a relation is to be obtained even by one who is a sinner. All men are naturally God's children, created by Him in His own image, loved and sought after by Him even when gone astray in sin. Moreover, those who by repentance and faith return from the error of their ways to the bosom of God,—these become God's children in a full and proper sense. They gain the heritage of adoption, that is, forgiveness of sin, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. But in Christ there is One who never went wrong, who had no need of returning to God, who during all his life remained sinless, and whose filial communion with the Father was always unbroken. Yes, such was Christ, and He alone of all men; and this exalts Him above the estate even of Adam, or the first man; indeed, even above that of the angels, making him a man who not only in humble obedience subordinated himself to the Father, but at the same time partook of the divine majesty, as is expressed by these Scriptures: "All power has been given unto me in heaven and on earth;" "Before Abraham was I am." On that account Christ is denominated "the only begotten Son of God," or as it is said in Hebrews 1:3, "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the Word of His power." There-

fore, as it is stated in this Creed of the Apostles, even though Christ did become our brother, He is at the same time our "Lord;" one who is by nature far above us, and will remain above us, with all His condescension and mercy, and under whose guidance we must, as His humble servants, place ourselves with implicit trust and entire surrender.

"Our LORD,"—thus we address Jesus of Nazareth; and what other great historical personage would we feel like calling by such a title? There are people to whom a Goethe, a Carlyle, or an Emerson is their Lord; and to the opinions, edicts and errors of these men they subscribe with more or less of reserve and exception. But it is certainly an unworthy servitude to make a poet or a philosopher, some imperfect human being, significant only for his eminence as a writer or thinker, the ruler of one's intellectual and spiritual life. Blessed is the man who calls Jesus his Lord, who gladly enters His service, and is led by Him, the infallible and perfect One, to a more abundant life.

The peculiar manner in which the Only Begotten Son of God became also our brother, is set forth in the following words: "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary." Human reason is inclined to take offense at this part of the second article and perhaps will always do so. But does not the entire personality of Christ, with its peculiar divine-human dignity, surpass mere human reason? It is not a mystery to be explained only on the ground of God's omnipotence and love, something that our sin-laden souls seek after with holy desire, and gratefully accept without fully understanding? Besides, if we really believe in Jesus Christ as the only begot-

ten Son of God and our Lord, and as a manifestation of God's wisdom and love seen in the incarnation, even this part of the article we are considering should not appear very strange to us. "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the virgin Mary." Such a statement would rather appear to be the only one worthy of our Lord. He was to become really our brother, absolutely a man, entering our race in the natural way, yet with no shadow of a taint of our sinful flesh upon Him. Therefore the passage reads, "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary." Most heartily and believingly do we here endorse Luther's salutation, addressed to the babe of Bethlehem:—

"All hail! Christ Jesus, blessed King,
To thee our voices praises sing,
To humble birth from virgin fair,
As joyful angels witness bear.
Hallelujah!

The Father's only Son behold
In lowliness, as long foretold;
Eternal riches lie disguised
In humble flesh, through sin despised.
Hallelujah."

III.—Christ's Sufferings and Death, or His Great Atonement

The Creed continues: "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." Here the question might be raised, whether it would not be in place for us to fill in a great hiatus that seems to have been made in the account, given by the Creed, of Jesus' redemptive work. Has not the entire earthly ministry of our Lord been omitted in this account,—that is, His works of healing, His miracles, His comforting ministrations, and His

gentle but forceful preaching? In fact, a defect of this kind has again and again been charged against this old Apostolic Confession. Here can be seen, so our opponents affirm, the one-sided representation given by this Creed of Jesus' character; which is nothing less than a mark of primitive Christianity. Besides what it tells about the marvelous birth of the babe in the manger and the crucified Prophet, this Creed leaves out, so it is said, the entire active life of Jesus, all His deeds of love and beneficence; and these are the very things, so they tell us, that for the modern man must be pronounced the cardinal traits, the most attractive features of Jesus' character, after that character is stripped of the elements of phantasy and miracle surrounding it. What an inappreciative criticism this is, surely! The Apostles' Creed, with its matchless emphasis put upon the sufferings and death of Christ, shows a profound appreciation of Christ's redemptive work. The most important factor in our Christian religion is here asserted; putting to shame, as it does, all modern wisdom. No real Christian will deny the glory and the preciousness of the entire life of Jesus. In all its peculiar features that life was a manifestation of God. In its deeds and teachings can be found an inexhaustible supply of wisdom and love. And this very richness of the life of Jesus, in all its peculiarities, is indicated by the two names,—"Jesus, Christ,"— which stand at the very opening of this second article of the Creed.

Still, with His miracles and teachings alone, our Lord would never have redeemed the human race. With all His criticism of the sinful conditions existing in the world, and the graphic description which he gives of the kingdom of God and its righteousness,

with all His wonderful interventions in special cases which here and there mitigated the seriousness of sin and death, with all these acts of wisdom and love, Jesus would never have established a new order of things and a new life for man in his immediate relation to God. That was accomplished by His sufferings and death, by the perfect atonement which He made for the sins of the world, and thus opened the way for the free exercise of God's forgiveness and renewing love. It is solely for this reason that the Apostles' Creed, since it does not undertake to depict the life of Jesus in detail, sets in bold relief, so to speak, the very climax of that life, by mentioning, between the incarnation and the resurrection, Christ's sufferings and death as the most important part of His life,—which part, moreover, was the special purpose of His humiliation. Christ's complete humanity was necessary, so that He might die, and very naturally His divine glory also looms up in this connection. With us ordinary mortals, sorrow and death form the decline of life. In the case however of Jesus' wonderful life, death was the very climax up to which all other experiences led; and for us His death has become a source of life. On this account it was that the only begotten Son was made flesh; so that as the Good Shepherd He might not only lead His sheep into green pastures, but also give His life for the sheep. The very gist of His ministering love, is the fact that the Lamb of God died for us. "For the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Far be it from us to underestimate the prophetic announcement of truth and the royal grace and fullness of spirit that were characteristic of Jesus' life.

We shall always endeavor to make those peculiarities in the life of Jesus profitable examples for our own life. Still, Christ on the cross shall, more than anything else connected with Him, engage our attention. Jesus on the cross is our own suffering and death. From the cross we hear the words, "It is finished!" And by Jesus' resurrection it was confirmed and vouchsafed that sufferings and death should always be invested with the greatest significance and power. As in nothing else, the guilty conscience finds peace and rest in the great atonement which Jesus effected on the cross. Jesus' death on the cross was the greatest test of His character as an example, the most influential sermon He ever preached, the most exalted manifestation of His royal majesty ever made during His earthly life. Christ on the cross is the most effective testimony against sin, and it is also the most effective call to repentance and Godliness in life. There, as nowhere else in His life, Christ becomes to us a motive power for the crucifixion of the flesh, together with all our sins and evil desires, and for taking up the cross and following Him. All this is put before us in the second article of our Creed, by the simple statement: "Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried."

Deny if you will, or even modify the atonement effected by Christ on Golgotha,—that is, the reconciliation of the Father by the Son,—and you at once pierce to the very heart the Christian religion. God forbid! We will take our stand along with Luther, who so fully appreciated this particular article in the Apostles' Creed, and who also has given expression to its internal connection, its blessed truth, and earnest obligation, in that extraordinary explanation

which he gives of this same article: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death; in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."

All this is most certainly true; and may we appropriate the truth of this extraordinary explanation in our lives.

AMEN!

V

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST, WITH ACCOMPANYING EVENTS

TEXTS

1 Peter 3: 18-22

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

1 Corinthians 15: 20-26

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

V

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST, WITH ACCOMPANYING EVENTS

"I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried." This first part of the second article of our Creed, was made the subject of our study two weeks ago. To-day we will continue the same study of Christ and His redemptive work, as that subject is described in the second part of this article: "He descended into hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

I.—Christ's Descent Into Hell

Familiar and widely known as those different truths are with us, they have been, and still are, to many people incomprehensible, yes, even an offense. That applies particularly to the first statement made in this part of article two, viz., "He descended into hell." In both older and later times therefore voices have been raised in favor of eliminating this dogma

from the section mentioned. Critics have taken the view that the oldest version of the Apostles' Creed did not contain this statement, but that it was inserted in later centuries. This contention explains the absence of that statement from a number of the service-books used by some of the Reformed Churches. Still the later embodiment in the Creed of this part of article two, by no means proves its inadmissibility or its uselessness. Rather does it show that in this old Confession, as at first existing, there was need of a place for a truth which, although not fundamental, was really important and precious, if rightly understood. This statement supplies, at an essential point, a connecting link in the doctrine of Christ's person and work. It is a truth proclaimed quite emphatically by Peter, in one of our texts. To be sure, this truth is not often mentioned in the New Testament. Still we hold that whatever mention is made, by writers of the New Testament, of Christ's descent into hell, was doubtless based upon revelations given by the risen Saviour to His disciples respecting events that occurred between His death and resurrection. We most strenuously reject, as militating against the authority of God's Word, the notion that Peter, in the mention he makes of that fact, merely gives us his own idle fancy.

Christ "descended into hell." We admit that the expression chosen is not a happy one. It is apt to be misunderstood. Ordinarily, when we speak of hell, we think of the place set apart for the lost. But no reference is made to such a place here. Peter, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, describes for us the state of the dead who lived before the time of Christ. These he refers to as being neither saved nor lost. By way

of illustration he mentions the generations of those who perished in the flood. "Spirits in prison" he calls them; for they had not entered into the blessed and heavenly liberty of the children of God, nor could they have so done. They were in a state of uneasy confinement and forced restraint, leading a kind of shadowy existence. Among them were some who longingly waited for redemption and the Redeemer; prophesying, they looked forward to the future, these righteous ones, these seers of the Old Dispensation. Now, while His body was still resting in the tomb, Jesus comes to this place of the departed souls repeating His message, or what He said on the cross: *"It is finished!"* A full atonement for your sins has been made on Golgotha. If you will only believe in me, the gates of heaven stand wide open for you also. I will lead you out of your prison to liberty, and from waiting and longing for salvation to its full enjoyment.

This is really the meaning of Christ's so-called "descent into hell." The entrance of Jesus into Hades or Sheol, as the ancients termed the place of the departed, has been made the subject of some striking representations in religious art, as we might note in passing. But by this act of His going into Sheol, Jesus has proved, and solemnly testified that His redemptive work was not intended solely for the benefit of His own generation and for others following it, but that it had also a retrospective effect upon the generations that had come and gone before his time. Christ's coming to our world worked an advancement of the human race, which was to tell on preceding ages. Heaven and salvation were by that coming made accessible for all mankind, whether dwelling in times

past, present, or future; provided they would by faith in Him as their Saviour, accept of His atoning sacrifice. What a potent and majestic perspective that was! A very practical and comforting truth it is also in our own day, when we consider the heathen who have not yet been reached by the Gospel, but who, alike in life and death, are situated as were the generations of the pre-Christian era. A ray of hope it is, perhaps, for those who because of unfavorable conditions and surroundings pass through this world without the cheering rays of the Sun of Life that shines from Bethlehem and Golgotha. May we not assume that as Jesus carried the message of His saving power to the departed souls of days gone by, so he may also, in the great beyond, reveal His grace to those who, through no fault of theirs, passed their lives at a distance from Him, and thus furnish them with an opportunity to believe in Him and enter the Kingdom of Heaven? This is a thought, so it seems to us, most comforting and sweet. Be careful however, lest this should become to you an encouragement to sloth, and cause you to postpone faith and conversion as a needful preparation for the other world. That would be a very dangerous and foolish taking of chances. We have grace and truth offered to us. We are not listed among those who have no chance. This is the day of salvation for all who will hear God's gracious call. "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Woe unto us, if we neglect so great a salvation. There will be no opportunity for us to receive what we have neglected in this present life, if, because of the hardness of our hearts, we fail to hear the Word of God. "He descended into hell." Let the significance and the comfort of this

passage be left to those who in this life did not learn to know the Saviour and His power to save, if perhaps in the other world He may find a way to enter their souls. But as for us, we will open our hearts to Him *NOW,* so that the glorious light of the next statement may illuminate our lives.

II.—The Resurrection and Ascension of Christ

(A) The Resurrection

"The third day He rose from the dead." The vestiges of the Risen Lord, left behind Him in His word and ordinances, form a plain path to the life eternal. There is no need here of any lengthy discussion of Christ's resurrection. That event is what may be called a seal put upon the divine character of Jesus' life and the eternal value of His death. Our blessed Easter festivals, or in fact every Sunday, is a living testimonial to the reality of that occurrence. The simple fact that primitive Christianity exalted the resurrection-day of Jesus, and made it "The Lord's Day," and some time afterward substituted it in place of the Old Testament Sabbath, is proof sufficient and clear that Christ did, on the third day after His burial, actually rise from the dead, and that this event became the very center of faith, as well as of comfort and power, with Christ's early disciples.

In the resurrection the primitive Church saw the glory of the Lord confirmed and perfected; also His living and beneficent presence with His disciples established, and the new personal life in the Spirit, together with our resurrection on the last day, vouchsafed. All the more painful, then, are the various perverse attempts made to disprove, or at least to

weaken, the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. In place of His actual resurrection, the resurrection-faith of Christ's disciples is, in these times, being substituted. How utterly ridiculous that is! How could such a faith have originated in their souls, without the actual experience, had by them, of a resurrection? Think of the fears and distress of these intimidated followers of Christ. Or if we concede that Jesus continued to live after death, and that various apparitions of Him appeared among His people, while yet a physical resurrection is denied, and Jesus' body is consigned to the grave and corruption, what a shallow argument it is to assume, as the cause of the disciples' belief, merely a spiritual resurrection! We have a number of trustworthy reports that the grave was empty, that the seal was broken, and that the stone was rolled away. Moreover, it must be believed that the body of Jesus, which had been the vessel of a divine life, could not perish and become subject to corruption. There is but one explanation left. Jesus did on the third day rise from the dead with a glorified body, with a body becoming always more and more glorious. This fact it is that makes Jesus' resurrection the pledge, or assurance, of our resurrection.

Between Christ and us, however, there remains this difference. We shall have a new body given to us in place of the old one returned to dust in the grave; which body moreover was infested with misery and sin, and was finally overcome in that way. But in the case of Jesus, although he came in the form of a servant and His body was subject to suffering, yet that body, unstained as it was by sin, overcame corruption; and because of its sinlessness it survived death and the grave, and was carried by the Saviour

into the glories of Heaven. Accordingly we read in the tenth verse of the sixteenth Psalm: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Is there not in all this a suggestion that the more we are penetrated and governed by the Spirit of Christ the more shall we be enabled to overcome the infirmities and lusts of the flesh, or at least to put a check upon those matters, and thus to effect a kind of spiritualization and glorification even of our physical nature? And it might also be suggested that this effect of our being penetrated and governed by the Spirit of Christ, may be regarded as a preliminary and condition of our coming resurrection. In the inspiring hymn which we sometimes sing, all this is to some extent expressed:

"Only see ye that your heart
Shall rise betimes from earthly lust;
Would ye there with Him have part?
Here obey your Lord and trust;
Fix your heart beyond the skies,
Whither ye yourselves would rise."

(B) The Ascension

Still this matter of the resurrection, whether it be of Christ or of ourselves, must always remain a profound mystery. Mysterious in like manner is the fact declared in the following: "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the father Almighty." On every Ascension Day we celebrate that farewell hour in which Jesus parted from His disciples and from the earth, when "a cloud received Him out of their sight." Here I must notice

the difference in interpretation between our own Luther and Calvin, the father of the Reformed Church. To this day that difference of view forms a wall of separation between Lutheran Churches and Reformed Churches. Luther affirms that "the right hand of God" means everywhere; and that by His ascension the glorified body of Jesus now shares in the divine attributes of omnipresence. As a consequence of this divine property belonging to Him, Jesus—so Luther teaches—communicates, in the institution of the Lord's Supper, His glorified body to all believers. On the other hand, Calvin maintained, and the Reformed Churches to this day hold, that by His ascension the glorified body of Jesus was exalted to a certain place in the glory world, and that there Jesus must be sought and found; and as respects the Lord's Supper, that is represented as a being lifted up of the believing soul to the heavenly throne, where it is fed with the efficacy of Christ's glorified body. Now we cannot deny the profound mystery surrounding this whole matter of the Lord's Table. It is inscrutable and really indefinable; it passes mere human understanding. Others may accept a different idea of it, but the Lutheran Church holds to Luther's view. And as to this divine mystery, we may remark that the full light of its interpretation will dawn upon us when we are lifted to a higher plane of being, and shall live and move among things celestial, and have the privilege of beholding the miracles and laws of the invisible world, those great wonders of our God and Saviour.

Meantime there is left us, as a practical consideration for our Christian life, some absolute truths, derived from this passage which tells us about

Christ's ascension and glorification,—truths such as that our Saviour is our heavenly King, who rules over us; a High Priest who intercedes with the Father for us; and a Prince of our salvation, who leads us on toward Heaven. Onward and upward! That is the command given to the church militant. Great and precious are the truths respecting Christ's exaltation, which this passage teaches us. We will never surrender these truths, notwithstanding any difficulties which our souls may experience in confessing them. No vulgar objections or ridicule coming from superficial minds, shall ever rob us of this valuable heritage connected with our faith.

III.—The Final Judgment

No less grand, potent and indispensable is the truth set forth in the closing words of this second section of our Creed: "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The Saviour often and with much emphasis spoke of His return to judgment; His second coming was in fact dwelt upon more frequently than was any other of His associations with the world He came to save. To deny this teaching, therefore, is equivalent to accusing Christ of falsehood, or at least to charging Him with an illusive self-deception. It is only logical that scholars who do not accept the teaching of a creation as revealed in God's Word, should be unwilling to listen to the doctrine of a judgment at the end of the world. Persons in whose estimation the holiness of God and sin are mere sound and smoke, are not in condition either to believe in or to fear a Day of Judgment. He who sees in Christ only a man, cannot recognize in Him the Eternal Judge. Christians, however, who con-

ceive of this world as being imperfect, must necessarily believe that it is doomed to destruction, so as to give place to a better world. We who are believers in God's holiness and justice, realize the inherent need of a full and final triumph of this holiness and righteousness, in the final Judgment. We who behold in the Lord Jesus Christ a manifestation of the holy love of God, and who on the other hand see in His death a most outrageous deed of injustice and sin, look upon His glorious return as King and Judge, as a necessary accompaniment to His vindication before an unbelieving world, and as a concluding act in His redemptive work; yes, even as the final Judgment itself, by the exercise of which He will lead His flock to peace in that world which is in all respects perfect, the new heaven and the new earth.

The relation of this general, public and solemn Judgment, a worthy closing of the world's history, to the judgment to which we are summoned directly after death, according to Heb. 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment," presents another mystery. To explain it if possible we have to assume that this private or personal judgment accomplishes for us a primary decision, which is confirmed by the general and public Judgment; such decision bringing honor to some and shame to others. Moreover, in this final decision accomplished by the general Judgment, the body given us at the resurrection will necessarily participate.

Many things regarding this whole matter of a future judgment are, we must admit, still wrapped in darkness. But a matter that can be easily understood and kept in mind by us, viz., that there will certainly be a judgment of some kind, and that Jesus will be

our Judge; oh, how this should remove from our relation to Him, true and faithful as it should be, all trifling and weakness, and from our lives all frivolity, shallowness and thoughtlessness, and merge our entire existence into a profound and earnest effort to stand if possible the test before His eternal throne!

The various matters of faith which we have been considering to-day, surely have no indifferent bearing; no impracticable dogmas are presented by them. Like rays of light they shine into our hearts and consciences; all of them being building-stones for the re-establishment of our inner life; also for that of the life of all mankind. "Descended into hell,"—that means that we should build on the mercy of God, both for this life and that which is to come. "On the third day He rose again from the dead,"—that prompts us to rejoice in the Easter glory of our Saviour, and to clothe ourselves with Easter qualities. "Ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty,"—this admonishes us to be heavenly minded, both in prayer and in our daily conversation. "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead,"—this warns us to prepare for the great day of Judgment, and to draw near to the Saviour as our Judge; this Judge being, thanks be to God, at the same time our Saviour. Let us draw near to Him, with the prayer of an humble and sincere heart.

"Thou Judge of quick and dead,
Before whose bar severe,
With holy joy, or guilty dread,
We all shall soon appear.

"Our anxious souls prepare
For that tremendous day;
And fill us now with watchful care,
And stir us up to pray.

"To pray and wait the hour,
That awful hour unknown,
When, robed in majesty and power,
Thou shalt from heaven come down.

"Oh, may we all be found
Obedient to thy Word—
Attentive to the trumpet's sound,
And looking for the Lord!

"Oh, may we all insure
A Home among the blest;
And watch a moment to secure
An everlasting rest!"

AMEN!

VI

THE HOLY GHOST AND THE CHURCH

TEXTS

John 14: 16-18, 26

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 16: 13, 14

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.

Romans 8: 9-17

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

VI

THE HOLY GHOST AND THE CHURCH

"I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints."

This evening we are to give attention to the third article of the Creed we are still considering. Descending from the heights of omnipotence which we found in the first article, and from the heights of grace which we found in the second, we now enter the valley in which the great stream of Christian life may be conceived of as a flowing stream, and as developing both in the church and the individual. An immediate connection between God and man is expressed by the words in this third article: "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

"Is the Holy Ghost true God?" Thus reads a question in our Lutheran Catechism. The answer is, "Most certainly; for the Holy Scriptures ascribe to Him divine names, divine attributes, divine works and honors. Of a truth the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ; it is God himself in His influence on the hearts of men, also the exalted Saviour in His continuous acts of grace and revelation. There is something truly mysterious connected even with the spirit of man, with its breath-like activity and nature. How much greater then, a thousand times, is the mystery connected with the Holy Spirit,

that source of light, that breath of eternal peace, that stream issuing from the Mercy Seat, as He is called in one of our Pentecostal hymns. How mysterious are His secret, yet open, His quiet, yet manifest operations, his offices of discipline and doctrine, of chastisement and comfort! To enter upon an exhaustive discussion of matters connected with the Holy Spirit would be like an undertaking to solve an insoluble problem, a useless task; to coin such a mystery into words and thoughts would be a vain endeavor. Much more important and profitable it is for us to give heed to the work of the Holy Spirit, to make a free course for Him, to open our hearts to His blessed influence. The different statements made in this third article which we are now considering, all tell, one after another, about that work.

I.—The Work of the Holy Spirit

"I believe in the Holy *Christian* Church." By these words this last section of the Creed refers to the great field of the Holy Spirit's work on and in man, or to the Christian Church as founded, gathered, guided and protected by that Divine Spirit. And since this great institution is a structure built out of many stones, a body consisting of many members, this extensive work of the Holy Spirit presupposes and even includes His activity in individual souls, or the work of renewal described in the last statements made by our Creed. In these statements, understood according to the two poles of thought contained in them, there is, first, the groundwork of the renewal mentioned, described in the words, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins;" and then comes the crowning conclusion of the entire work, "I believe in the resur-

rection of the body, and the life everlasting." The work of the Holy Spirit in the entire human race, or more particularly in the Christian Church, and the work of the Holy Spirit in individual souls,—that is, in their sanctification,—these matters will form the subjects of our study later. This evening, guided by the order of the different statements made in the Creed, we will select for our consideration these words: "I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints."

"Dear Saviour, help! Thy Church uphold;
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold;
Endue thy Word with power and grace,
And spread its truth in every place."

II.—The Church as a Communion of Saints

"The Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." These two statements made in one breath,—do they mean the same thing? Is the Christian Church really a communion of saints? Is it a holy institution? Yes, and No! Yes, as to what the Holy Spirit does and desires to do in it. No, as to what men in their weakness fail to do. Yes, as to the idea, or the ideal, put before the church. No, when we consider how perverted from that lofty conception the church really is at present. Therefore it is said, *I believe in it*,—that is, something invisible, even though I do not yet see it. The difference between the visible and the invisible church, is thus already indicated.

There was a time in the past history of the Christian Church when it came up, not fully but approximately, to its high ideal; it was then in reality a holy church and a communion of saints, as it came

forth from the hand of the Holy Spirit in the bloom of its youth. That was the time of the primitive Christian congregation, in the days of the Apostles. The Church was then a real communion of saints. Not a communion of sinless people; such an erroneous conception of what it is to be holy, those early Christians would have repudiated. Still the Church was then a communion of people entirely Christ's own, a people given to Him with a peculiar fervor of faith and earnestness as they strove to imitate Christ. To be sure, the Book of Acts, as well as the Epistles of Paul, John and Peter, reveal faults and defects in those early congregations; still Peter was encouraged to address them in the words: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people."

This state of things in the primitive Church was brought about by the Holy Spirit, unto whom the hearts of that people were in a peculiar sense open. If one should inquire as to the ways and means employed by this Divine Spirit, a three-fold answer can be given. First, in the midst of that primitive Church there still lived the Apostles, those men who had enjoyed the benefit of Jesus' special training, and who in a singular and incomprehensible measure were filled with and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. What a salutary influence must have gone out from them, besides the sound doctrine which they taught; what a sanctifying power for the unity of the congregation. We can make daily use of the power of a good example. One person by his kindly conduct may impress his own character upon his associates. That can be said of the Apostles in the highest and holiest sense. And to this blessed influence exercised by

them, a second virtue must be added. Because of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, they possessed the gift of discerning spirits,—that is to say, they had positive insight into the hearts and consciences of the people surrounding them. Thus they were enabled and authorized to discern all dangerous and sordid elements within the congregation, and to unmask these elements, to reject them, and to exercise what is known as church discipline. That can be noticed in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, whose falsity Peter exposed. Paul also, as is evident from his Epistles, exercised such church discipline. Church discipline, that unhesitating and sharp pruning away of unsound elements in the Christian community, was the second ground-pillar of its holy character.

The third ground-pillar was tribulation. In those times the cross stood prominent in the Church, and the followers of Christ bore it through trials and persecutions. Outwardly that cross pressed hard upon the shoulders of the faithful, yet inwardly it guarded them from evil, just as to-day the cross exercises the same kind of power in blessing and safe-guarding us. The cross urges the Christian to prayer, with always new tests of faith and confession. It prompts him to a pains-taking care and discipline of his daily life; yet to a continual discipline under the Holy Spirit, so that Christ's followers shall not expose themselves to criticism before men, or before their enemies. By the cross the tide of superficial church members was stemmed; for the things which such elements in the Church look for,—comfort and honor,—were not to be found in that community. Here were only those who could find happiness and satisfaction in being spiritual and who desired to be spiritual, men who

could be satisfied even under the discipline endured, and with that comfort which the Holy Ghost supplies.

Thus it came to pass that at the time when Christianity was weighed down by the cross, when the stakes of martyrs were blazing, when the arenas were saturated with the blood of Christians, that at this very time the Church of Christ stood out the purest. Then, too, it was full of spiritual fruit and blossoms; being planted upon these three pillars: *Apostolic influence, church discipline, and tribulation.* These pillars, however, soon began to totter; and with that change the holy character of the Church was greatly injured. The Apostles died; and although they had provided for spiritual leaders, that is, for shepherds, and bishops, their successors were not their equals, the spiritual influence emanating from them being far inferior.

Church discipline in this age became lax. Where it was exercised, and at times quite rigorously, the censors having charge of it were lacking in accurate discernment of the various spirits they had to deal with, and consequently the healthful effect naturally resulting from discipline was absent. Whenever church discipline is conducted without the gift of discernment, or of a proper insight into human hearts, judgments will be faulty; frequent and fatal mistakes will be the logical consequence. Under such conditions it may happen that the publican will be excluded, and the Pharisee accepted. Think of the atrocities committed during the middle ages, under the mask of Christian discipline and good order, when the most faithful witnesses of the truth were cruelly persecuted, and many of them assassinated.

And finally, a matter that after the hardships of

decades and centuries appeared like a deliverance from all evil,—that is, the liberty and toleration granted to the Church by the Emperor Constantine, and even more, the dominating position which he granted to it,—lo! this very thing deprived the Church of her simplicity and purity, those virtues which amidst her fiery trials she had so well preserved. The privileges granted to the Church, and which were so highly prized by her, became fatal to her inner life. People now pushed their way to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism; since those who had been baptized stood highest in public estimation, and were considered most eligible for positions of honor and public trust. In many cases, indeed, it was no longer the drawing influence of God's Spirit, but some other influence, that brought men to Christ. Thus the Church ceased to be a communion of saints, while it was fast becoming a secular power.

But in making this statement I do not wish to be understood as affirming that the communion of saints had altogether ceased to exist. The work of the Holy Spirit within the Church did not at any time relax. God forbid! The Holy Spirit was always active, even in the darkest days of the Church. The assembly of those who permitted the Holy Spirit to enlighten and renew them formed, so to speak, the inner nucleus, the real active power within the great congregation, with its mixture of people. To be sure, the management of external affairs was never entrusted to this class, consisting as it did of humble people. The government of the Church rested mostly in the hands of earthly-minded, ambitious men, who did not build up the habitation of Christ, but at times wasted it. We all know what great abuses and heresies were born

in those days, to what serious alienations from her true purpose the Church descended, and how great a number of genuine Christians were persecuted for the sake of faith. Then, under the lead of Luther and others, the Protestant Reformation became the means of re-establishing, on the old and solid foundation of the Apostles' teaching, at least a part of the Christian world. But now we ask, has this purified Church, restored as it was by that mighty movement of God, become truly a holy Church, a real Communion of Saints? With deep regret we must confess that it has not. Impure and sordid elements have gained admittance. A large amount of sin, a mere appearance of piety, external forms and the like, have found lodgment within it. At the very beginning of the Reformation, iconoclasts and fanatics attacked Luther and his followers with bitter reproach. In later times one sect after another has repeated the charge of dead orthodoxy as characterizing the Lutheran Church, and has separated itself from us, claiming to be better and holier than we are, and therefore to be in need of a holier congregation. Some of these sects seem to have a strong attraction for certain classes of mind and disposition, and these are not the worst people, either; for we must confess that at least many of them are truly desirous of obtaining real spiritual life and spiritual fellowship. It may be that we Lutherans have been too stiff and reserved, in our ways. Many people coming from the Fatherland have brought with them this peculiar attitude, and have thus, although unintentionally, repelled people who wished to find in our Church the benefit of Christian association and fellowship. Still the Lutheran Church in America has grown and is de-

veloping in an extraordinary way, in keeping with the progress of this great and free country and with the spirit of the nation; also making the only proper use of the liberty enjoyed here, since we esteem it as a possession which Christ has bought for us.

It is too late now for us to remedy the mistakes of the past; we must make the best of the present, and prepare for the future. But allow me to ask, Does any one of the sects that have seceded from our Church form a real communion of saints? Far from it, we think. We grant that at least in some of them there are many earnest minds and good discipline; and often there can be found in them a close relation of Christian brotherhood or fellowship. But on the other hand there can be found, we are sorry to say, mere deceptive semblance, hidden sins, manifest failures, unkind judgment, pharisaism, a false ambition and sad disunion. Besides, in some of these sects many people have entirely lost their faith, and have gone out into the world.

But, alas! there is no sect, no church, no religious constituency on all the earth, that can be denominated a true communion of saints. The Lord Jesus predicted this in His parable of the tares among the wheat, and such a state of things is only natural. Every communion that is established among earthly conditions, requires external forms and rules. But wherever external forms and rules are found, there people are not wanting who content themselves with the mere form without the spirit. God be thanked that, notwithstanding this, the spirit of real Christian work does not die, but continues its operations from century to century, carrying forward the Christian religion, and changing the hearts and lives of men

in all the different churches and congregations. There are real or living Christians of all creeds and among all peoples; and all these taken together constitute, even without knowing one another or associating one with another, the real communion of saints, the one holy, invisible Christian Church; and these real Christians form the nucleus or the spiritual unity of all churches, and are the support of the present age, the very salt of all nations. What a precious reflection it is that, despite all the infections and schisms existing among Christians, there still exists a holy Christian Church, a communion of saints, a people that can truthfully be called the Body of Christ, the Bride of the Lamb!

III.—Practical Considerations

And what a great and important mission is given to us, as members of this invisible universal Church. As all our Confessions teach, we enter the Church by Baptism. By this Holy Sacrament men are received into "the covenant of grace;" for as it is stated in Luther's smaller Catechism, "It [that is, baptism] worketh forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and confers everlasting life on all who believe; as the words and promises of God declare." But few, however, abide in this baptismal grace. Blessed are they who, through the good influence of Christian parents and other such helps, are preserved therein. Most people fall from such grace through manifold sins. If these desire to be restored to the privilege of adoption, they must seek the help of the Holy Spirit. Let us not be satisfied with being merely recognized and conscious members of the visible Church. Furthermore, let us avoid overestimating

the importance of the Church as a visible institution. There *is* such a thing as overestimating the visible church. This can be seen in Roman Catholicism. Among Romanists the visible Church is the one great thing. The Roman Catholic Church assumes to itself such titles as "the only authentic church," "the only saving church," and teaches that outside of Romanism "there is only sin and apostasy," etc. Still, even in our Lutheran Church, there are those who have much to say about "Protestant liberty," and "Evangelical truth." To be sure, these are precious gifts. Beware, however, lest you think that Protestant liberty and Evangelical truth can make the Church a spiritual paradise, and that such possessions are able to make you a child of God, without Christ Himself dwelling in the heart. In order to be saved the Holy Spirit must make you a child of God, through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Nor is it right for you to see only shadow and defeat outside the boundaries of your own church. Recognize gladly the good existing also in other churches. The Spirit breatheth where he will. Extend the hand of fellowship to all spiritual minded people, and with them submit to the discipline of the Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth. Together with all such people grow in the knowledge of God, which comes by the tuition of the Spirit, within the one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.

If, however, you are thus admonished not to overestimate mere external forms, on the other hand you should not underestimate the importance of the visible Church. Of a truth, the Holy Spirit breathes where he will; he works in all churches; he gathers his people from all corners of the globe; of no one

church dare we say, there is no evidence here of the life of the Spirit. Neither would it be right for us to affirm that in this or that church it is impossible for one to be a genuine Christian. Still, between the various churches one decided difference can be found. In one church things spiritual are taken more lightly than in others; in one church the Spirit-life pulsates more strongly than in others; here the sacraments and doctrines of the church are given a wider berth than in some other churches. If by way of analogy the different visible churches may be considered schools, the office of which is to educate men for the invisible church, then one school is better than others. Or, to use another comparison: The invisible church is the Holy Place, and the different visible churches are the courts surrounding it. To reach the Holy Place, one must pass through these outer courts. Still, one court is nearer to the Holy Place than is another. And here let me say, without any disparagement of other churches, that we Lutherans can gratefully and joyfully acknowledge the high character of our own Church; since it must be admitted that we, as a Christian body, point out a straight road leading to God and the Saviour. We claim, not to lead people in any by-ways, past priests and saints, nor to teach them to depend upon themselves for salvation. But we strictly admonish them to throw themselves on the mercies of God. Our effort is to preach the Gospel in all its purity and truth, unadulterated by human inventions; and as to the sacraments, we dispense them according to their original institution. And all this we can say without any attempt to exalt ourselves in particular, or to show disregard for the claims of other Christian churches. Let us then gratefully

recognize and make use of whatever spiritual forces there may be in our Church; remembering the words of our Lord, "Unto whom much is given, of him much will be required."

Much has been given to us, in our Lutheran Church. We have the entire Bible, the inspired Word of God, to operate on our souls. Our confessional writings are a true and clear interpretation of God's holy will as revealed in the Word. We breathe the air of evangelical freedom. We eat the bread of life of evangelical truth. A strong spiritual life flows around us, penetrating our hearts and consciences. Still, much will be required of us, far more than from some poor Roman Catholic, who is fed upon a few legends about Mary and the saints; far more than is required of those who are taught that man is justified by the deeds of the law. With all such people the Eternal Judge will exercise forbearance, according to what has been given them. But of us there is required a personal Christian faith, manifested in knowledge, and daily living,—that is, a new spiritual life, derived from the conviction that we are justified by faith alone in Christ. Besides, we must worship God in spirit and in truth. May His Holy Spirit help us to fulfill these various obligations.

"Come Holy Spirit, Lord God, and fill
With thy rich grace heart, mind and will,
And each believing soul inspire
With thine own pure and holy fire.

Lord, by the brightness of thy light,
Thou in the faith dost men unite,
Of every land and every tongue;
This to thy praise, O Lord, be sung."

AMEN!

VII

THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

TEXTS

Psalm 32

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

Romans 3: 21-26

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemp-

tion that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Romans 6: 1-11

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he dieth, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

VII

THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

"I believe in the Holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints,"—these words from the third article of the Apostles' Creed gave us opportunity in our last discourse to speak of the invisible and the visible Church. In other words, it was the work of the Holy Spirit carried on before our eyes on a gigantic scale, within the Church on earth, and within the field of her different missions. This work has in view for its accomplishment, and in fact for its presupposition and aim, a work on the souls of men. For it is individual souls that form "the communion of saints." The work of the Church consists in leading souls to the Holy Spirit for protection and discipline.

For of what use would it be for you to learn to appreciate the work of the Holy Ghost and of the Church of Christ, if the Divine Spirit were not to operate within you? The Apostles' Creed therefore, after speaking of the Church in one of its last statements, passes over to that activity of the Spirit which takes hold directly upon the lives of individuals. Without undertaking to treat of that subject in its different stages, the Creed sums it all up in these words: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Here we have the very climax of the Holy Spirit's work. These words indicate the greatest blessing with which

the Holy Spirit endows human life, or that peculiar gift by which he renders men happy. This precious jewel, we might also say here, after being practically lost by the Church during the middle ages, was found again by the Reformers, and very highly prized by them.

"The forgiveness of sins," a priceless gift of God, the highest blessing of human life; let this be the subject of our present consideration. We will notice, first, *the need of forgiveness;* secondly, *the fact of forgiveness;* and thirdly, *the fruits of forgiveness.*

"O LOVE, thou bottomless abyss!
My sins are swallowed up in thee;
Covered is my unrighteousness,
No spot of guilt remains on me;
While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, free boundless mercy, cries."

I.—The Need of Forgiveness

"I believe in the forgiveness of sins," these words presuppose in the person using them, a felt need, or a conviction that without the forgiveness of sin he cannot be happy. Do men have such a feeling of need? Many there are who do not have it, because they do not realize the fact of their own sin as being a calamity; they do not regard it as an abomination, or as a matter of guilt; they rather delight in sin. Others consider themselves so perfect in character that they do not need forgiveness. Still others conceive of sin as an infirmity, a natural state of transition through which all must pass; and so they think they have no occasion to desire forgiveness. Thus it happens that the Gospel message, which is the most glorious of all good tidings, has no effect upon many a heart.

Are we going to harden our hearts against that message? God forbid! Even the poor heathen would put us to shame, should we so do. For in all their worship, their sacrifices and expiations, despite the erroneousness of the methods by which they seek relief, a deep longing for forgiveness, a strong sense of being guilty, can be recognized. This need, so deeply felt, is an illustration of sincere self-criticism. It condemns the flattery of others and the delusion of one's own mind. It is a manifestation of conscience; something that can be suppressed only by violence, self-deception and illusion. And to what profit is all this violent suppression, this resisting of the Holy Spirit? In some decisive hour conscience will find a way to perform its work. The awakened conscience itself will become the effect of that punitive office which the Holy Ghost exercises on all men. One can withdraw from such work of the conscience only by a complete hardening of the heart. Many a person who has thus seared his conscience has, in the hour of death, cried for mercy. Oh, how terrible it is for any one to depart from this life without that consolation which comes from the confession: "I believe in the forgiveness of sin."

And even if, to the hour of death, you should not feel the need of forgiveness, and should deem it unnecessary for you to have the mercy of God, does that signify that you do not need forgiveness? How often are the sick mistaken as to what they really need. Frequently they choose, as a remedy, something that is least conducive to a restoration of health, and repudiate other and genuine remedies. It is a sign of an unhealthy spiritual life when men feign not to be in need of forgiveness, or when they refuse to heed the

punitive work of the Holy Ghost, manifested in conscience and through the Word of God. That Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Let us pause for a while, in view of the Holy Spirit's punitive office, and let us in painstaking self-examination open our hearts to that Spirit. And this, I may say, refers especially to you who to-day desire the comfort and grace connected with an observance of the Lord's Supper. Let us bring to this holy sacrament a sincere confession of our sins. If you wish to become beneficiaries of the Holy Spirit's office of comforting, then you should first submit to his office of chastisement.

This matter concerns us all. Among us there are those who carry about with them a deep sense of their sins, and a longing for forgiveness, or the blessed experience of having their sins remitted. Still there are others before whom their sins have not loomed up as being so great and so much in need of atonement. But if you will look into the mirror held up before you by conscience, and into the mirror of the Ten Commandments, and into that of the pure and undefiled character of Jesus, you will find,—that is, if you look carefully, quietly, and impartially,—that one after another in your thoughts, words and deeds, sins of commission and many more of omission, will rise in your memories. Thus it becomes at once apparent to us that our relation not only to men, but also to the Holy Spirit, is not what it should be, and such as God demands. Then, too, a deep longing for new and holy powers so that in the future we may overcome sin, will necessarily arise in our minds. And last,

but not least, a requirement is that an earnest spirit of anxiety shall take possession of our souls, to be delivered from the sins which up to the present time have contaminated and burdened us, or that all our sins shall be cast into the depths of God's mercy.

Some modern writers have made the claim, and many thoughtless people have accepted the doctrine, that man is not in need of divine grace. Faults and defects of character, they say, must be got rid of by a progressive development. Forgiveness, they claim, is the logical consequence of improvement in character. But if that is so, no account should be taken of the fact that all real strength for a new life can come only from God's forgiveness; also that all spiritual betterment here on earth must always remain fragmentary. But suppose you should tomorrow make a complete change of life, that you should fully and faithfully discharge all your duties, do you imagine for one moment that you could make amends for all your past short-comings and sins? Most assuredly you could not. After all your efforts there would remain, for instance, the wasted hours and capabilities, the injuries inflicted upon yourself and upon your fellow men. The evil seed sown, even if now you sow only good seed, has become rampant, and you can no longer uproot it. There is nothing left for you but to pray, with David in the thirty-second Psalm, or with the publican in the parable, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Copernicus, the great astronomer, wrote as an epitaph for his own tomb: "Not the crown of Paul, nor the honor of Peter, do I desire, but a place in Paradise by the side of the malefactor on the cross." Such a spirit it behooves us all to have. The desire for forgiveness is a fundamental necessity

of the soul, just as hunger for one's daily bread is a necessity of the body. Do you understand now why the petition in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses," follows directly after the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread?" The Psalmist likens the condition of a man without forgiveness to that of one starving for food: "My bones are famished on account of my weeping all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, my moisture was turned into the drought of summer."

Most truly we all need forgiveness of sins, and that from God. Forgiveness from man is a comfort, it lightens the heart; still it does not remove guilt. God only, against whom in the deepest sense sin is a revolt and an indignity, can fundamentally forgive sin and break its power. Woe unto us, if we fail to realize the need of forgiveness! Woe unto us, if we fail to seek that extraordinary benefit; for only by seeking it shall we be able to find it. Blessed are we, if by seeking we find this peculiar benefit, so that we can say, in the words of the Creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

II.—The Fact of Forgiveness

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,"—such is the teaching of the thirty-second Psalm. And yet the forgiveness here spoken of, the mercy in the Old Dispensation, was not a full and complete pardon. Sin was "covered," so we read in the Scriptures quoted; sin was not imputed, but there was no entire removal of it. In His forbearance, Paul tells us, God passed over the sins that had previously (before the time of Christ) been committed. Divine forbearance withheld the out-

stretched arm of God's justice. Merited righteousness, such as is dispensed in the Gospel of Christ, was for a time deferred, until the righteousness of God was "once for all" satisfied in Christ's atonement, and thus a free course was opened for sin-remitting grace; so that only now, in the New Dispensation, is it possible for one to rejoice with perfect confidence while he repeats: "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." Forgiveness is not merely a much desired possession, an ideal of pious souls, a glimmering star in the night of poor, sinful humanity, something that at last proves to be only a will-o'-the-wisp. God forbid! Forgiveness is a genuine fact, firm as a rock. I accept it as confidently as I believe in Jesus' coming in the flesh, or as I believe in His meritorious death on the cross, and in the truth of His last saying, *"It is finished."*

"I believe in the forgiveness of sin." As an expression of my faith these words are equivalent to saying not only that I believe in Jesus and in His death on the cross, but also that I believe in His resurrection and ascension, as our Saviour and Redeemer. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

"I build on this foundation,
That Jesus and His blood
Alone are my salvation,
The true, eternal good.

Without Him all that pleases
Is valueless on earth;
The gifts I owe to Jesus,
Alone my love is worth."

"I believe in the forgiveness of sin." This belief has made the Christian religion the great friend and comfort of the human race, distinguishing it from all other religions. That is a settled fact. And the quintessence of the Christian religion is this belief, and not, as some scholars to-day assert, the transforming power of this religion, not its new ethics or something of that kind. Great, it is true, are these matters. But their greatness is all derived from the fact of their connection with belief in the atonement and the forgiveness of sin. Forgiving love toward our fellow men, which is the postulate as well as the effect of true Christian belief, would all be ineffectual without the incomparable example of God's forgiving grace as manifest in Christ, and without the experience of that grace in a believing heart; which experience again incites one to the practice of love and forgiveness. Without that historic basis, and without this inner connecting link between God's forgiving grace and man's forgiving love, the ethics of Christianity dwindle to something essentially no higher, purer, stronger and more productive than were the imperfect moral teachings of the Old Testament or the humanitarian principles found in the philosophical systems of ancient paganism. No, indeed; the very height of grace is disclosed in Christ, His atoning work is the great miracle of love.

With this message of reconciliation, and of the forgiveness of sin brought about by such reconciliation, the Holy Spirit has all through the Christian ages been exercising his office of comfort. With it, as the most blessed of all offices, he has disseminated innumerable benefits to thousands and millions of souls that were thirsting for righteousness and salva-

tion. He has filled all such hearts as were open to repentance and faith. He did that for Luther's soul, when famishing for peace, by those words which a fellow monk whispered in his ear: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." In and through the Reformation the Holy Spirit exercised this office upon the Church, intimidated as it had been by medieval legalism. To-day he exercises the same office in the preaching of the cross, and in the Sacrament of the Altar, the first and fundamental meaning of which is a remembrance of the atonement, and the solace of the remission of sins.

This office of consolation, my dear Christian friend, the Holy Spirit is anxious to exercise upon you, if you will only accept what he brings, or if by repentance and faith you prepare yourself to listen to his word of grace.

Some people desire to experience this comfort of the Holy Ghost in special inner beatitudes, in an inexhaustible supply of peace. If, as in by-gone days, storms arise within their souls, they are disappointed. In the end many doubt the reality of a forgiveness of sin, because they cannot feel it. Be of good cheer, my Christian friend; even if for a while you miss the sense of peace and blessedness, your comfort lies in this, that Christ's blood was "shed for many for the remission of sins," or in the fact of God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has already begun his work of comforting in you by bringing you the words just quoted, or by testifying to the grace of God as taught by those words. Wait quietly and patiently; and over against the contradictions of your own feeble heart let it be your firm confession, as is said in the Creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of

sin." Then the fact of such forgiveness will become more and more a blessed experience; the Holy Spirit will always in fuller and richer measure, exercise his office within you.

III.—The Fruits of Forgiveness

Wherever the Holy Spirit comforts, he also fully and perfectly instructs, and disciplines. Forgiveness of sin is also, and at the same time, the root of Christian knowledge and of Christian sanctification. "He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me." In Christ, the crucified and risen One, in His work of redemption, the Holy Ghost shows us the very center of the divine counsel and of the plan of salvation, the center of all human history and of its development, the very depths of the divine glory, the deep things of God.

"I believe in the forgiveness of sin." This means that I believe in God, who is love, and whose love cannot rest satisfied until it has attained its object in the welfare of man.

If true Christian knowledge grows to be a spiritual fruit of forgiveness of sin, realized and experienced, the same is true of Christian sanctification.

Forgiveness of sin, as nothing else in us, brings about grateful love to our God and Saviour; which love strives to please him, and to do the things that please Him. It developed that extraordinary love in the sinful woman, concerning whom Jesus said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven the same loveth little." Forgiveness, like nothing else, produces disgust for sin,—for that terrible thing which cuts us

off from God, and which cost the Son of God the precious and bleeding sacrifice which He made for us.

"Here will I rest, and hold it fast,
The Lord I love is First and Last,
The End as the Beginning!
Here can I calmly die, for Thou
Wilt raise me where Thou dwellest now;
Above all tears, all sinning.
Amen! Amen! Come, Lord Jesus,
Soon release us;
With deep yearning, Lord,
We look for thy returning."

Forgiveness of sin, or the communion established with God through forgiveness, creates that joyous spirit which, without fear or force, does that which is good, as a practical proof of such communion.

Forgiveness of sin produces a constant exercise of humility; causing us to realize the truth of the Scripture teaching that "we are saved by faith," and impelling us not in haughtiness of mind to depend and build upon self-righteousness. Rather does it teach us to depend upon the promise, or the hope that "He who hath begun a good work in us, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Upon a new foundation of the remission of sins, the Holy Ghost established within us, a new creation or a new man in body and soul, and on the day of the resurrection this new creature will, in a new and glorified body, shine in perfection.

Thus in the statement, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," there is uniformly implied, as existing in a germ, the entire restoration of man. It is not a defect or a weak point in our Creed, but an exceedingly great and centralized thought, that with regard to the restoration of man this Confession says only

one thing, which is, *"I believe in the forgiveness of sins."* "For," as Luther says, "where there is remission of sin there is new life and salvation."

This passage in our Creed may be regarded as a bridge leading over to the last two, or the closing ones, with which next Sunday we will bring our studies to an end: "I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Let us this evening close our meditation with the earnest desire that, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the passage we have been studying may become in us a fruitful truth in which we shall live, and at last die in peace: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

VIII
THE LIFE EVERLASTING

TEXTS

John 11: 25, 26

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

1 Corinthians 15: 35-43

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh; but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor: it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.

Revelation 21: 10-12; 21-27

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high,

and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

VIII

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

"I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." This is the last statement made in the Creed which we have been considering. With a brief discussion of it we will bring this series of sermons to an end. This statement forms the very crown of all that is taught in this important Confession; the goal toward which all previous teachings lead, and where they all end. Without it our Christian faith, or indeed the entire Revelation of God, in which we believe, would remain fragmentary.

Also the whole creation of God would remain fragmentary, or indeed would suffer shipwreck in its most important work, if man, made in the image of God, were to perish in death, and thus be reduced by death and corruption to the grade of a mere animal order. So, too, the work of redemption would remain fragmentary, and become a task half finished; and even the resurrection of Jesus Christ would prove only a strange, meteoric event, if Christ's power of redemption and of giving life was unable completely to vanquish death as an experience for us. And lastly, in the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit, cause and effect would have no relation one to another, and only an imperfect beginning of the work would be accomplished, if the spiritual new birth and the blessed

result of man's spiritual development were to be the whole of this work, or if, by the resurrection of the body, those achievements were not, so to speak, to be supplemented and carried forward to completion.

We can understand how unbelievers, addicted especially to the earthly-mindedness of materialism, who deny the existence of God and the truth in Christ, can deny also this section of our Creed, and particularly that part of it which speaks of the resurrection of the body. A Christian, however, who believes in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, accepts these teachings as a matter of course, or as something truly glorious and comforting. Even with those who have not penetrated to such beliefs, or who may be concerned with doubt, this section answers to the inmost stirrings of the heart, moved as it is by a longing for life and a fear of death. If any of you belong to this class, you will never be free from a fear of death; and your longing for life can be satisfied only in the presence of the living God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Wherever God is, there is that life eternal which conquers death and removes its horror; wherever He is, there is the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

I.—The Eternal Life

Of these two teachings then, in our Creed, we will consider the first one, on this the last Sunday in our Church-year, which from olden times has been devoted to a service in memory of the dead, and to a contemplation of eternal life. "Life Everlasting,"—this is the closing statement of our Creed, and it is one that is heard throughout the entire Confession. For where the living God is, there is life, everlasting

life. God's only begotten Son is the Prince of Life, God's Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Life. Two weeks ago we recognized and considered, as a fundamental operation of the Holy Ghost in our hearts, that forgiveness of sin which the Son of God acquired for us by His redeeming work, and which the Holy Spirit attests and brings to our consciousness as a personal possession. Then also we heard Luther say that "where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation." As soon as the fear of God's judgment is removed, and the presence of unrepented and unforgiven sin exists no longer, an entirely new joy in life, a kind of life-giving power, real happiness, takes possession of the soul. And this kind of life is life everlasting, since it is, by faith and prayer, connected with the living and eternal God, and is continually assured to us by the fullnes of divine life in the Spirit, in the Word, and in the Sacraments. Not only in the life of our bodies, but also in that of our souls there are many evidences that bear the stamp of transitoriness; so miserable and paltry is this natural life of ours. But whatever of the influences of sanctification and of the knowledge of the truth, coming from God himself, penetrates this natural life, that really lives, is unconditionally able to endure, and is intended to give us life, even the fuller life. To this it is that Jesus alluded in what He said to the Samaritan woman: "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And again, in John 17:3, He says: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

So, then, to the Christian who has received forgiveness of sins, and has become a child of God, eternal

life is not only an object of hope, but is a real possession, an enduring asset, something that carries within itself the sure hope of a life persisting after death, or of an eternal continuance and perfecting of whatever of the divine life we can even now call our own. Just as surely as we know that this earthly life of ours is finite, and that like everything else in this world it will crumble and corrupt, so we also know that whatever of God there may be in us,—this can never die, but must endure forever. The thought of eternity in general and of personal immortality in particular, has connected with itself much that is enigmatical. We grow dizzy in any attempt that we make at following it up. Still we do not need to follow it up to the end, any more than we are able, or desire, to conceive fully of the existence and essence of God. God and eternity both surpass all our powers of thought. But, thanks be to God, we can believe in Him; and we can hope for an eternal future life, in which all that, during this period of infirmity and sin, encumbers the child of God, will be laid aside; and life, simply because it is life, will be a simultaneous development of all our powers, a continual progress from one glory to another. Still this progress will not be restless or wearisome, but rather a profound, most blessed rest. Indeed, that which here on earth is a contrast, namely, rest and development, will in the life eternal be only one and the same. If for one who here in the flesh is unable to use, to its full capacity, his physical strength, perhaps because he has been confined to a bed of sickness,—if for such an one it is sweet to hope for eternal life as a state of existence in which his powers will have an opportunity to develop, and new spheres of achievement will be open to him, so also is

it sweet for the weary and worn pilgrim to look forward to that "rest which remains for the people of God."

What joy there is in such contemplation of an endless life, with its different stages of existence, and with the possibility of meeting and communing with the saints in heaven, and of a final reunion of all the blessed. How little, too, can we say respecting that future life besides this one assurance: "So shall we ever be with the Lord." Moreover we can say, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," (Rev. 7:17). "And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away," (Rev. 21:4). Still these brief statements are important, and sufficiently glorious to lighten up the dark valley of this our present life, and to guard us against the fear of death which, more or less, oftener or less frequently, affects us all, the old and the young, the godly and the ungodly.

A great man, a truly spiritual man, once said: "Why should I fear death? True death, that of the natural man, lies behind me; a painful death it surely was. Now I live. I already partake of eternal life, and though many a hard stretch is yet before me, and many a dark valley must be crossed, the destination is a life ever richer, and a glory always brighter." Oh, that we all were, or might become, so spiritually minded that we could sincerely and humbly join in this confession. Blessed are we, if we walk, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that he will inspire and sustain within us a sure hope of life everlasting. How very different, too, our lives would become by such an experience,—much more peaceful,

much safer. Besides, the ending of life with us would be joyous; whether, as in some cases, the transition to the great beyond comes suddenly and unexpectedly, or, as in others, as a long looked-for relief.

Both of these experiences, in a kind of parable, I beheld on two different occasions, in the year 1911. On the first day we climbed up a steep path, between walls of rock that hid from us the blue sky; when suddenly a turn in the way brought us to our destination. We stood on the heights of the Gemmi Pass, a cozy inn being a few steps distant. Before us lay expanded an immense and beautiful mountain panorama, illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun. On the day following everything was different. From a deep valley, on one of the hottest days of the season, we made our toilsome way up for many hours, in order to visit a small mountain settlement. Our joints became sore, physical strength failed us, and our feet almost refused to do service. But during all that wearisome ascent we could see, away up high, our place of destination; it being marked by the steeple of a small village church. For hours that steeple greeted and encouraged us, until finally, to our great relief, the goal was reached. I am unable to tell you which of the two experiences was the more pleasant, and on which of the two evenings we entered our shelter with the greater joy and gratitude. In like manner our entrance into our Heavenly Home will be equally joyous, whether we reach it after a long, wearisome journey, or by a sudden departure from this life; only so it is our Heavenly Home that we enter, only so we shall be able to confess, "I believe in the life everlasting;" whether that confession is made on some toilsome path of the earthly life, or by an unexpected summons.

II.—Resurrection of the Body

But it is not only said in our Creed, "I believe in the life everlasting," but also, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Everlasting life, of which we have thus far spoken, is in the first place a spiritual life. To us it appears to be so great, glorious and comforting in its nature, that, when the body falls to pieces and is given to corruption, the spirit may still live. Also it is our belief that, even by its liberation from the body of this death, the spirit attains to the highest and purest stage of life. Will it suffice us, as it did so many sages of old, and as it has done with so many of our modern scholars, to praise the immortality of the soul and to accept of that idea, while we surrender to death those bodies of ours? Most certainly not. Our Christian faith is far richer and more satisfying in its teachings; for we know, as Paul tells us, that "He who raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus," (2 Cor. 4:14). The life of Jesus is to be fully manifested in us, even in our mortal bodies, "for we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh," (2 Cor. 4:11). For such a manifestation God gives us His Spirit as a pledge: "Now He that wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit," (2 Cor. 5:5). Indeed, as in the account of the man afflicted with palsy, the Lord Jesus first said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," and then added, "Arise, take up thy bed and go into thine house," so in the Apostles' Creed, to the forgiveness of sin and the full health of the soul and the eternal life involved in that blessing, there is added the resur-

rection of the body, as a lesser benefit, so to speak. Still this resurrection is a matter belonging to that complete restoration and perfect renewal of man for which the forgiveness of sin through the agency of the Holy Spirit is the glorious pledge. Man was created, body and soul. The corporality of man is not in itself an evil. It was only by sin that it became affected with the curse of death and all its consequences. Death is now to be expelled from this region; in death Christ's power of life is to be made manifest in the creation of a new body, which is to be given to the purified and saved spirit as a worthy habitation.

This body will be a new creation, as Paul so lucidly explains in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. This chapter is really an Easter sermon. It should be preached again and again, and with the utmost emphasis, in view of the gross materialistic notions so current in these times. "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Thou fool. That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body," (1 Cor. 15:35-38). The body which we now have will crumble and corrupt; a new body, glorious and incorruptible, will be formed out of new matter by the omnipotence of God.

A certain connection exists between the body as it now is and the future resurrection body. That should be so, if for no other reason, than because both bodies serve one spirit, as in the case of tents. Moreover, they bear the stamp of that spirit; the present

body the stamp of the sinful spirit, and the resurrection body that of the sinless spirit. The Apostle indicates the secret of this connection by his parable of the seed and the fruits. Still all attempts at explaining this connection, and giving an exact representation of the future glorified body, fail, and must necessarily fail, because we cannot look into the work-shop of our God, and see its prospective handiwork. Surely, also, that is unnecessary. Let us rather be satisfied with an attempt at gathering from this multicolored and beautiful picture of Holy Writ the truth respecting this new body, and respecting that new world in which glorified humanity shall live and move; that is, the Heavenly Jerusalem, described in the Book of Revelation. This is a truth complementary to that of eternal life, and which promises, beyond the time during which our present bodies moulder in the grave, and our spirits live in the presence of God, a higher state of blessedness when both soul and body, being reunited, shall rejoice in the living God. And this truth, we may say, becomes doubly precious and comforting when we consider the many cases of persons suffering from sickness, bodily deformity, and the destruction of physical life. How consolatory is the message found in this chapter of First Corinthians, when we hear it repeated, either in our cemeteries, or upon bloody fields of battle, or in hospitals, or at the burning stake of martyrs: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power," (1 Cor. 15:42,43)

III.—Disposition of the Dead

Doubtless some of you, at this point in our discourse, are expecting a discussion of cremation, as a means of disposing of dead bodies, and one that in these times, for aesthetic and sanitary reasons, is so highly recommended. Does this method accord, or does it not accord, with our belief in the resurrection of the body? A most pitiful belief that surely would be, for one to hold that God's creative power must stop short of the urn. God is able to raise up, and will raise up, the new body, in whatever way these old bodies of ours may perish, whether by corruption or cremation.

Very justly the Christian Church still clings to the old custom of burial, from what it esteems a proper respect for the present body, as a noble and divine creation which we do not ourselves feel like destroying, but would rather surrender to the processes of nature, or in other words, leave in the hands of God. We commit our loved ones to the ground from that spirit of reverence which loves to visit their places of burial and decorate them with green, a beautiful color that symbolizes both life and hope. Also we do this from reverence for the example of our Saviour, whose rest in the grave consecrates all our graves. And, once more, we thus dispose of the bodies of our dead because this custom of putting them in the ground so plainly expresses the thought of the seed-corn and the coming harvest, a thought which the poet thus renders:

"To the dark lap of Mother Earth
We now confide what we have made
As in earth, too, the seed is laid
In hope the seasons will give birth
To fruits that soon will be displayed.

"And yet more precious seed we sow
With sorrow in the world's wide field;
And hope, though in the grave laid low,
A flower of heavenly hue will yield."

And so, without claiming overmuch as to the importance of the question, and without condemning the views of others, I judge that we shall continue our custom of burial. Still we would have our graves and cemeteries to be, not places of sentimental mourning and false worship, but gardens where the risen Jesus meets us, as once He met Mary Magdalene. Then, too, our desire is that they shall be abodes of hope, where the triumphant confession is heard: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

CONCLUSION

Thus may this Creed of the Apostles, with its final statement, transfigure our cemeteries and deathbeds, as with its opening words, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," it magnifies the cradle of the child. So also this Confession, with its testimony respecting Jesus Christ and His holy person, and respecting the Holy Ghost and his work, answers the deepest questions of minds, solves the most important riddles of our lives, and points out the true way of happiness.

Also it might be remarked here yet, that these sermons were intended to increase our estimate of this old historic Creed, and make it with each of us more fully a fruit-bearing possession of faith and life. May that purpose have been accomplished. And may this Confession resound in our lives, helping us to go forward in our way as children of the Heavenly

Father, as the redeemed of Jesus Christ, and as spiritual children who are heirs of life everlasting. And notwithstanding any attacks that may be made upon this Creed, let it always and everywhere resound upon our lips, as even now we say: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church; the communion of Saints; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

AMEN!

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